Shelter Statistics.
While each Shelter Program is able to generate statistics about the services that they provide, the Department of Commerce, on a fairly regular basis receives requests for information about the number of homeless persons in the state. When responding, we must address inaccuracies and inconsistencies in available statistics, as well as the various definitions of what constitutes "homeless"., Recognizing that at best we only have information on persons who are interacting in some way with an agency, we must, ultimately respond in some way to the requests.

So what number do we give out? Glad you asked.
After determining the geographic area of interest (statewide vs. county or region), we establish a time period for the data. Obviously there is a difference between how many persons are homeless today, (i.e. right now) vs. homeless during the month, or during the year.

1. We start by taking the number of Homeless from the Client Served report in WISP. With the ability to do a statewide number (all of WISP) or by selecting a region (this was published in a recent newsletter and is also on the WISP web site) the number of persons in shelters by region and time period can be determined.
2. Next we determine the percentage of available emergency beds that this number represents. This past year each COC reported to HUD (and to Commerce) in Exhibit 1 Housing Activity Chart on the number of Emergency beds in their area, with an indication of the number of those beds which are in WISP. Statewide this percentage of coverage in WISP is 71%, and is slightly higher or lower when calculated at the COC level.
3. HUD's new Annual Homeless Assessment Report or AHAR provides a methodology for calculating the estimated total number of homeless persons based on the number of beds reported and the percentage of the total that this number represents. Using the AHAR methodology, the number of unreported persons in shelter is added to the number found in WISP to give a total figure.

Considerations for your agency and your COC with respect to these statistics.
1. If you indicated that your shelter was using WISP, and you fail to enter the client information into WISP, the number of homeless served will be undercounted, as the methodology assumes that for shelters who indicated they were using WISP, ALL clients are entered.
2. If the number of shelter beds reported on Exhibit 1 is wrong or has changed significantly since it was reported, then the percent coverage is off and this affects the total count.
3. Care must be taken to be sure that entry and exit dates are recorded for all clients at your shelter. A client who is shown as entering your shelter is assumed to be there until the exit date. If the client leaves and no exit date is recorded, then the number of homeless persons will be overstated, as persons no longer in the shelter continue to be included in the total.

As time goes on we will continue to work with all shelter programs to help us all, from the individual program, to the COC, to statewide, be able to get the most accurate picture possible of the homeless situation in the state.